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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

OF

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FOR

**SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR GENERATING
REPORTS IN A TELECOMMUNICATION SYSTEM**

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/219,195, filed July 19, 2000, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to apparatuses and methods for generating reports concerning provisioning and inventorying of telecommunication services.

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2. Related Art

Companies offering telecommunications services, such as landline telephone, wireless telephone, Internet or other services, typically maintain tremendous databases concerning the provisioning and inventorying of the services that they provide. For landline telephone services, for example, such a database typically includes, for each assigned telephone number, the name of the customer to which the number is assigned, the terminal location to which the services are provided, the features associated with the number (such as, for example, speed dialing, call waiting, caller identification, call forwarding and the like), and other information necessary to effectively administer management services provisioning.

Typically, there is a hierarchical structure to the way the telephone numbers in a telecommunication company's database are organized. For example, telephone numbers assigned to geographically proximate locations are typically given the same 5 first three digits and grouped into an exchange; all exchanges serviced by the same switch are grouped into a wire center; and wire centers in the same region (such as, for example, the Southwestern United States) are grouped into catalogues.

Routinely, those administering the provisioning of 10 telecommunication services must access the stored data so that it may be reviewed. Such a task is conventionally accomplished by generating a report which recalls the data and presents it in a format that is readily understandable. For example, an administrator may desire a report which sets forth all of the 15 telephone numbers in a given exchange that have subscribed for a given feature in a given exchange, such as express dialing in the exchange designated by the numbers "978" of area code "813". Such a report, as might be expected, is generated by specialized software which reviews the data looking for those numbers that 20 fit the specified parameters, and compiles and outputs a resultant listing.

Conventionally, such report-generating software is text-based, and is run on mainframe systems, with a different mainframe dedicated to and accessing a database for each catalogue. Thus,

for a large telecommunications company that provides services in multiple catalogues throughout the country, a separate report must be generated by each mainframe, if a company-wide result is desired. Also, conventional report-generating software can only 5 provide a report on an on-demand type basis, in response to a user request, and does not offer the flexibility of being able to schedule reports for automatic generation.

There is a need, therefore, for a method and system that allows reports to be generated based upon the data of multiple 10 catalogues, and in accordance with a pre-defined schedule, as well as on-demand.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

In response to the above deficiencies of the prior art, the present invention provides a Web-based software tool for 15 generating reports concerning the provisioning and inventorying of telecommunications services, either on-demand or in accordance with a user-defined schedule.

Thus, in a computer system having a client/server architecture, a method is provided for generating reports based on information in 20 a telecommunications provisioning and inventorying database. The method includes a server presenting a user at a client end with a page offering parameters for formulating a report and scheduling the running and delivery of the report; the user selecting parameters upon which the report is to be formulated and

scheduled; and the server interfacing with the database to retrieve information designated by the selected parameters and generating the report in accordance with the selected parameters.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a server for generating reports based on information in a telecommunications provisioning and inventorying database. The server is on a network utilizing a client/server architecture and is operable to: communicate with a user at a client end; present the user with a page offering parameters for formulating a report and scheduling the running and delivery of the report; receive parameters, from the user, upon which the report is to be formulated and scheduled; and interface with the database to retrieve information designated by the selected parameters and generating the report in accordance with the selected parameters.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided computer code running on a server for generating reports based on information in a telecommunications provisioning and inventorying database, the server being on a network utilizing a client/server architecture. The code includes: code for communicating with a user at a client end; code for presenting the user with a page offering parameters for formulating a report and scheduling the running and delivery of the report; code for receiving parameters, from the user, upon which the report is to be formulated and scheduled; and code for

interfacing with the database to retrieve information designated by the selected parameters and generating the report in accordance with the selected parameters.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there
5 is provided a method of a client ordering and scheduling reports from a server for generating reports based on information in a telecommunications provisioning and inventorying database, the server being on a network utilizing a client/server architecture.

The method comprises: contacting a network address of the
10 server; in response to receipt from the server of a page offering a selection of parameters for formulating and scheduling a report, selecting the parameters; and receiving the report in accordance with the scheduling parameters.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention,
15 there is provided an apparatus for generating reports based on information in a telecommunications provisioning and inventorying database, the apparatus operating as a server on a network utilizing a client/server architecture. The apparatus comprises:
means for communicating with a user at a client end; means for
20 presenting the user with a page offering parameters for formulating a report and scheduling the running and delivery of the report; means for receiving parameters, from the user, upon which the report is to be formulated and scheduled; and means for interfacing with the database to retrieve information designated

by the selected parameters and generating the report in accordance with the selected parameters.

In accordance with still another aspect of the present invention,

there is provided an apparatus, operating as a client on a

- 5 network having a client/server architecture, for ordering and scheduling reports from a server on the network that generates reports based on information in a telecommunications provisioning and inventorying database. The apparatus comprises: means for contacting a network address of the server; means for, in
- 10 response to receipt from the server of a page offering a selection of parameters for formulating and scheduling a report, selecting the parameters; and means for receiving the report in accordance with the scheduling parameters.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- 15 Figure 1 is a block diagram of the report generator system of the present invention; and

Figure 2 is a detailed block diagram of the server-side architecture of the report generator system of the present invention.

20 **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE
PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS**

The present invention allows a user to generate reports as to provisioning and inventorying of telecommunications services.

- 25 Preferably, this functionality is implemented by software

operating on a distributed system having a client/server architecture, specifically, a client under the control of the user and a server running on a host processor having access to a database.

- 5 Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating the overall client/server architecture of the system of the present invention. As shown in the figure, the system, in accordance with the present invention, includes browser software 10 running on a client side 1 that can communicate over a network 3 with
- 10 server side applications 2 to access global data originating from multiple catalogues throughout the country. The client side browser software 10 allows a user to interact with the server side 2, through a server gateway 20, to specify parameters for a report by specifying routing information, e.g., state;
- 15 catalogue/wire center; range of telephone numbers, and the type of information being sought, e.g., all numbers having certain features; all numbers having express dial tones; status and service type of all cables. Users also can specify a time schedule for report generation, and the destination of the
- 20 report, e.g., an e-mail address or file transfer protocol (FTP) destination. A group of back end servers 30, at the server side 2, perform the back end processing and data retrieval functions necessary for preparing the reports.

The reports generator of the present invention has a three-layered architecture: a) a user interface, which preferably is accessible through a network, and particularly preferably over the World Wide Web; b) a reports back end server; and c) a database engine, which gives the user access to the inventory information.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the user interface of the reports generator gives the user access to various reports such as would be available in an online transaction program of a telecommunications company (telco). Such online transactions programs control assignment, activation and inventory services for the telco.

In the reports generator of the present invention, the user is given the option to view previously run reports for any given schedule ID. In a preferred embodiment, only users belonging to the same security group can view another's schedule information and access the report. The reports generator also allows the user to view the last few schedules of the user currently accessing the reports, and gives the user the ability to schedule the report at any future time for any time zone, and to periodically schedule the report on an hourly, daily, monthly, or yearly basis. Once the ordered reports are ready, the generator also allows the user to receive the reports via e-mail or FTP, or e-mail or FTP the generated reports to others.

The user is presented with HTML pages from the server allowing the user to specify reports to be run as to various geographical areas, and at the state, district, division and wire center or switch level.

- 5 By the server interfacing with the database, reports also can retrieve information from different catalogues or different states and show all information in one document.

Preferably, an HTML page is presented to the user presenting him or her with a list or menu of reports from which to choose. Once

- 10 the user selects a specific report, the user is directed to a parameters HTML page and permitted to choose the specific parameters required for the selected report. Once the parameters have been chosen, the user has the option either to run the chosen report immediately, or to schedule it for a future date
15 and provide e-mail, or FTP information, if desired, to facilitate that delivery. Once the report starts executing, the run information is continually updated, and the user is kept informed as to the status of the report, preferably by displaying messages such as NOT_COMPLETED, NOT_STARTED, COMPLETED, or the like.

- 20 From the point of view of the server, software running on the server, in response to being contacted by the user's client browser, through the gateway, presents the user with a series of user interface (UI) screens. Preferably the UI screens are written in HTML, which can be understood by the client browser

and which provides the capability to embed hyperlinks to other HTML pages on the server. Information, such as input parameters, is sent back and forth between the UI at the client and back end data servers using common gateway interface (CGI) software.

- 5 The detailed operation and structure of the system for ordering and delivering reports will now be described with reference to Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 2 is a detailed block diagram showing the server side applications 2 of the present invention. While the figure shows 10 only one gateway 20 and one group of back end servers 30, the system actually maintains one or more gateways 20 and back end servers 30 for each catalogue. The user can enter on his or her browser a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) for the catalogue the gateway for which he or she wishes to contact initially.

- 15 The operation of the system at the server side 2 will be described with respect to one gateway 20 and one group of back end servers 30. While each gateway is provided for a particular catalogue, the system is structured such that any gateway 20 can provide the user with one or more HTML pages giving the user the 20 option of ordering and scheduling reports corresponding to more than one catalogue.

Requests from the user are handled as follows. First, the user enters into browser 10 the URL of the gateway he wishes initially

to contact. In response, the user is presented with an HTML form allowing the user to enter a request for one or more reports.

The request from client browser 10 is routed over the network and then through the gateway 20. Process rpt_client 22, which

5 resides on the gateway device, receives and processes the information through the CGI software. The very first time the user logs in, the user is authenticated, using process secvu 24 for security, and a session ID is created for the user. That session ID is used with any future requests. Rpt_client 22
10 communicates to the back end servers (rpt_agent) 54 through an interprocess communication (IPC) messaging layer, through the gateway (process) 26.

The back end server program rpt_agent 54, in reports back end 50, receives the request for information from the client browser 10

15 and sends the client browser 10 either the HTML parameter page, from HTML 56, to be displayed or schedules the reports according to the schedule information that has been requested by the user.

Based on the catalogue or state information, the back end servers 30 create different messages and route them through the local 20 gateway process 52. The gateway 20 routes the messages to the appropriate rpt_server 46 on the database back end 40. Once the rpt_server 46 has received the message, it executes the reports, accesses information from the database 42 and the completed document is sent, by a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) exchange, 25 from report_executab 44 to report hard drive 59, where it is made

available to the program rpt_agent 54. The program rpt_agent 54 formats the report using a formatter 58 and maintains a copy of the final report on the report hard drive 59 . Whenever the user requests to see the report or have the report e-mailed, the 5 rpt_agent 54 sends the information retrieved from the report hard drive 59.

An extremely advantageous feature of the present invention is providing the user with the ability to not only order reports on demand, but also to schedule that reports be run at specified 10 times or intervals of time. This functionality is initiated by the user choosing the schedule option on an HTML page displayed on the user's browser. The user can select periodic reports, or that a report or reports be run at a specified future time or times.

15 The server, in response to the entry on the HTML page of the request for a scheduled report, stores the request in server side tables that are used to maintain the report schedule and run information for the reports being scheduled. At the server side, these internal tables are used by rpt_agent 54 alone and serve 20 the purpose of keeping a history of all the previously run reports and scheduled reports. The rpt_agent 54 also performs routine cleanup of the previous runs which are older than a predetermined age. While the reports themselves are preferably generated using a programming language such as C++, the output

preferably is filtered through Practical Extraction and Report Language (PERL), a language used for writing CGI scripts.

The report generator of the present invention provides many advantages when compared to prior systems. By virtue of the 5 scheduling options, and the e-mail and FTP delivery options, a user can organize his or her report creation tasks much more easily than was available with on-demand-only prior art.

Further, the ability to utilize the client/server architecture, such as the World Wide Web, to interface with the data through

10 the use of browser and server software, enables users of the system of the present invention to access information stored in multiple locations by contacting any of several gateways, as described above. Thus, the gateway for any catalogue can also provide the user the option to obtain reports for multiple other 15 catalogues.

While the present invention has been described in terms of reports for a telecommunications system, the applicability of the present invention is not so limited. To the contrary, the techniques described above may advantageously be used to organize 20 reports out of a database, centrally located or distributed, storing many types of information.

The above embodiments of the present invention have been described for purposes of illustrating how the invention may be made and used. However, it should be understood that the present

invention is not limited to the illustrated embodiments and that other variations and modifications of the invention and its various aspects will become apparent, after having read this disclosure, to those skilled in the art, all such variations and 5 modifications being contemplated as falling within the scope of the invention, which is defined by the appended claims.